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ABSTRACT

Intended for staff working within British further, higher, and adult education, this document provides practical examples of how colleges have increased learning opportunities for students with special education needs through flexible practices. The document is organized into the following five sections: (1) an introduction, which explains four areas of flexibility (aims and content; characteristics and stages of development in learners; the learning process; and the method of assessment) that the document explores in relation to those with special needs; (2) "How Colleges Are Developing Flexible Learning Opportunities," in which examples are organized under headings that match the four areas of flexibility; (3) "Overcoming Barriers to Flexibility," which tells how colleges have worked to overcome hostile attitudes, lack of resources, time pressure, entry qualifications, the nature of assessment, and the lack of flexibility in relation to the curriculum; (4) "Developing Flexibility," which discusses three approaches to effecting change; and (5) conclusions and recommendations. The sections on overcoming barriers and developing flexibility each contain a checklist readers can use to decide whether the issues raised are relevant to their colleges. The document also includes a 21-item bibliography and six appendices that contain information about the flexible learning project that resulted in the document. (CML)

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FLEXIBLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL — NEEDS —

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Flexible Learning Opportunities and Special Educational Needs

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I would like to thank the many people who helped in putting this document together, including:

- the staff in all the colleges who returned the questionnaire;
- the staff who attended the regional and managers' meetings (see Appendix III);
- the steering committee (see Appendix IV);
- Lesley Morphy, who prepared the early drafts of the documents;
- Merillie Huxley, FEU development officer, who supported the project throughout.

Deborah Cooper

This document is designed for staff working within further, higher and adult education.

It provides practical examples of how colleges have increased learning opportunities for students with special educational needs through flexible practice.

At the end of each section you will find a checklist that you can use to see whether issues raised are relevant to your college, and then refer to the text (if necessary) to see how colleagues have tackled these issues.

The document has been compiled by Deborah Cooper of NBHS (now known as Skill (National Bureau for Students with Disabilities)), a national voluntary organisation concerned with developing opportunities in further, higher and adult education and training for young people and adults with special educational needs.

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FOREWORD

This report is part of the guidance FEU offers from time to time on flexible learning. Other publications on this theme have included *Flexible Learning Opportunities* (1983) and *Flexible Learning in Action* (1984).

A main assumption in these documents was that there was considerable potential within the further education system for the creation of a wider range of learning opportunities than then existed.

This report arose from a recognition that the concept of flexible learning, with its emphasis on learner autonomy, was particularly relevant to the learning of people with special needs.

Good special needs practice has always offered examples of flexible institutional or teacher response to individual learning need. The quality of that response is vital to the successful integration of learners with special needs. The report gives examples of the kind of creative organisation than can achieve this.

Practitioners will find it particularly helpful to read this report in conjunction with a new FEU publication *Access to the Mainstream Curriculum*, which describes the start of an integration process for learners with special needs at Canterbury College of Further Education. The Canterbury report offers useful case studies of action.

FEU particularly welcomes discussion with colleges who are using the concept of flexible learning to enhance integration possibilities for learners with special needs.

Enquiries about this report or suggestions for follow-up activities should be put to Pat Hood, FEU Development Officer for Special Needs.

Dennis Drysdale
Deputy Chief Officer
Further Education Unit

1. INTRODUCTION

How the project began

The Further Education Unit published *Flexible Learning Opportunities* in 1983 and *Flexible Learning in Action* a year later. The first of these identified various possibilities for flexibility in provision within the existing further education system that local education authorities and colleges could usefully consider. The second described the development of student-centred learning opportunities in three colleges.

These documents were not concerned specifically with students who had special educational needs. This project, 'Flexible Learning Opportunities and Special Educational Needs' arose out of the recognition that the thinking and organisation behind many flexible learning opportunities are highly relevant to those with special educational needs. Furthermore, special needs provision already illustrates good examples of flexibility which can be used as models for other areas of work and act as a stimulus to the creation of more flexible learning opportunities for all students. The project was, therefore, concerned with the extent of flexible learning opportunities in further and adult education for students with special educational needs, and with ways in which such opportunities could be extended.

Definitions

A range of terms can be used to identify people with special educational needs. Historically, such people have been categorised according to their disability, an approach which tends to project negative connotations, ignoring a person's abilities and those needs which may have no relation to their disability.

The 1944 Education Act used eleven different categories of disability to classify children who were then educated separately in special schools. It was not until over 30 years later, with the *Warnock Report*, that real progress was made to overturn this rigid classification. That report introduced the concept of special educational needs, which it saw as applicable equally to further education and to schools, allowing for the individual to be assessed on need rather than on disability.

> 'To be seen not in terms of a particular disability which a person may be judged to have, but in relation to everything about him - his abilities as well as his disabilities - indeed all factors which have a bearing on his educational progress.'

The 1981 Education Act which followed the *Warnock Report* defined the term 'special educational need' in the context of provision within schools. The Act talks of someone who:

- ... has significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or

- ... has a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided in schools within the area of the local authority for children of the same age.

The *Warnock Report* and the 1981 Act, therefore, form a background to an understanding of the term 'special educational needs'.

This report uses a broadly similar definition, but is concerned with students in further and adult education whose special needs mean that they require additional and/or specific help to pursue chosen educational paths. This definition is consistent with other documents looking at specal educational needs in a broader context, for example, the FEU document *Relevance, Flexibility and Competence*, in which students with special educational needs:

> 'mean those who experience learning difficulties to an extent which demands the provision of additional and specific assistance'.

Special educational needs which arise exclusively from race and gender or any other characteristic are excluded from this study.

This document looks specifically at special educational needs rather than special needs in general, that is, needs in relation to a student's learning rather than in relation to his or her broader social or domestic life. While this may seem to be splitting hairs to those not familiar with the terms, the distinction is important since many professionals talk loosely about 'special needs' when really talking only of educational contexts (as may be noted in the quotations). In line with general practice, the terms 'special needs staff' is used to refer to staff who teach students with special educational needs.

Flexible Learning Opportunities defines flexible learning:

> 'In curricular terms, as the adaptation of available learning opportunities to meet the needs of the learner in a way that optimises the autonomy of the learner as well as the effectiveness of the process of learning.'

This definition still applies if the learner is, as in this case, one with special educational needs. Indeed, the adaptation of learning opportunity to meet the needs of the learner is at the centre of good quality provision for students with special educational needs, and it is this definition which is used in this document.

Flexibility, special educational needs and this document

Often, traditional learning opportunities are not opportunities for those with special educational needs. Few people with special educational needs are what the FEU documents describe as the 'traditional learner' on traditional courses. Developments in flexible learning are, therefore, particularly important for those with special educational needs; many of the measures designed, for example, to make colleges and college courses more accessible to individuals allow students with special educational needs to be catered for alongside other students.

This report, like earlier FEU documents, represents one aspect of a more general interest in how the education service can be responsive to the individual. The recognition that traditional learning methods need to be supplemented by new ones if future economic, social and political needs are to be met is clear (Walker, 1982).

A range of initiatives and developments can be associated with increasing flexibility. The emergence of adult literacy provision in the mid-1970s illustrates how it is possible to cater for those who previously have been excluded from the post-school education system. It has provided a range of different opportunities in different settings, taking place outside as well as alongside more traditional college provision - offering learning opportunities most appropriate to the needs of the individual (as illustrated in two documents, FEU's *Learning for Independence* and the Northern Council for Further Education's *Flexible Learning Opportunities in Basic Education*).

Since the introduction of the Open University in 1970 there has been a gradual development of open learning systems. In the 1970s, further education colleges pioneered flexistudy, often in association with agencies such as the National Extension College (*Flexistudy: A Manual for Local Colleges*). Generally, learning materials were produced in written form, rarely accompanied by audio-visual material. By the 1980s tutor-support arrangements were introduced and some new approaches to audio and video techniques. Much of this work was still restricted to GCE programmes.

Over the past few years, often with funding from the Manpower Services Commission (now the Training Agency), new schemes have been introduced to meet particular market needs. Most rapid growth has been in the service of industry and commerce. There have been examples, too, of learner-based systems employing new techniques in support of those with special educational needs. For example, the Hereward Open Tech Unit, based at Hereward College of Further Education in Coventry, was funded by MSC to promote access for people with disabilities to training opportunities offered by open learning courses, and to monitor progress of individuals.

Further and adult education have had to become more flexible as the student body has changed. Strictly vocational classes in further education for young people have given way to a much wider range of opportunities which include a very broad young people and other older students. A new flexibility can also be seen in much smaller but equally important modifications of provision and opportunities, for example by having 'roll-on/roll-off' courses or providing multi-skills workshops.

This document looks at ways in which further, higher and adult education institutions can provide flexible learning opportunities designed to help students with special educational needs. To investigate these opportunities, the National Bureau for Handicapped Students (NBHS) carried out a survey and held a number of meetings, as described in Appendix I. The document, which is based on the experience of teachers, begins by examining ways in which colleges are currently making flexible provision (Section 2). It then goes on to look at some of the barriers staff face, and ways in which they may be overcome (Section 3); and finally looks at ways in which colleges can increase flexibility (Section 4). The document begins with the notion of flexibility introduced in the original FEU document *Flexible Learning Opportunities*.

The four areas of flexibility

Flexible Learning Opportunities looked at four aspects of the needs of the learner:

- the aims and content of the learning;
- the characteristics and stage of development of the learner;
- the process of learning (i.e. the mode of learning, the resources for learning, the mode of attendance, the pace of learning and interaction with others);
- the method of assessment.

These four areas were used in this study to examine the extent of flexible learning opportunities for those with special educational needs. Each was reinterpreted in relation to those with special educational needs.

Aims and content

Flexibility in the aims and content of learning is seen in the development of curricula which are determined increasingly by the students and their needs rather than by the teacher or some outside body. Flexibility is particularly important for students with learning difficulties who may need help in developing the skills and confidence to determine what curriculum they wish to

follow, since they are often less mature than their peers and take longer to develop those skills. Students with special educational needs have fewer opportunities for making choices as many of them have had protective specialised schooling in small special schools.

In devising a curriculum which meets the individual's needs, the process of negotiation is important. Learning to make choices is, for the learner, part of both the aim and the content of the learning. It depends upon the college being able to respond to the individual and allowing him or her to develop. The student, therefore, needs guidance and information to be able to choose which opportunities to pursue.

Flexibility depends upon a range of options being available. Therefore, a prerequisite for flexibility is a curriculum which offers a comprehensive range of learning opportunities.

Characteristics and stage of development

Having to present evidence of existing ability, in the form of traditional examinations, before being accepted on to a course can be very inhibiting for students with special educational needs. Traditional tests used at secondary and post-secondary levels are not designed for those with low academic attainment and, therefore, are not good tests for those with severe or moderate learning difficulties. For those with physical or sensory handicaps, assessment of performance, or lack of it, through traditional examinations may also be inappropriate since they may well be unable to show their true abilities because of the form of the test. For example, a blind or partially sighted student will probably have difficulty with written examinations, particularly where diagrams are involved. Any assessment of an individual's level of ability will, therefore, need to be based on other indicators and such an assessment will need to be linked to the aims and objectives of the course being proposed. Methods of assessment, such as profiling, which can involve attributes such as personality and attitude, allow staff to reach conclusions about an individual's stage of development by taking into account the knowledge and experience of those outside the education system, including, for example, parents and people within the health services.

Process of learning

Flexible Learning Opportunities identified five components in the process of learning.

- *Mode of learning*: moves towards active participation in learning.

  Much traditional classroom activity is not suitable for students with special

educational needs. They often take longer to learn than other students. Slower working, shorter attention span, and the need for repetition of learning experiences all affect the mode of learning.

Practical activities may need adaptation if the physically or sensorily disabled student is to participate fully. Both additional staff and different aids to learning may be required if those with sensory and physical handicaps are to be able to undertake some courses of study. The inability to perform some activity, for example to look down a microscope, should not in itself prevent any individual from undertaking a particular course. Ways of teaching and learning particular skills which do not disbar some individuals will need to be found.

- *Resources of learning*: the development of resources outside the traditional classroom tools.

  A very wide range of resources available in the community can provide valuable learning tools and environments, and specialists from outside the education system can provide different approaches and new stimulation.

  Resources may take the form of extra staff, special equipment or facilities in the community.

  Learning to use resources such as libraries, resources centres, information technology or books is in itself part of the learning process for students with special educational needs.

- *Mode of attendance*: a system of attendance that need not necessarily require the student's presence within an institution.

  Student programmes may need to be adjusted in terms of mode of attendance, according to individual need. Mobility, co-ordination, pace of learning and psychological state are some of the aspects to be considered.

  An individual's ability to get to a centre may be severely limited. It may be impossible for someone to attend at all. But classes can be held outside college, in people's homes, hostels, hospitals or training centres. An accessible, well-resourced and adequately staffed drop-in centre attached to an institution can provide appropriate support. Distance learning programmes that provide support through correspondence or via the telephone can provide the necessary flexibility.

  If a student chooses a traditional mode of attendance but requires assistance,

then help will be needed and may be provided through volunteers or extra staffing.

Students with special educational needs may have limited concentration. A mode of attendance that requires attention from the learner over a lengthy period will often be unproductive for these learners. More frequent attendance for shorter periods is likely to be more appropriate; two part-time courses, for example, may offer more opportunities than one full-time course.

- *Pace of learning*: the control of the pace of learning by the individual.

  For students with special educational needs, the ability to modify the pace of learning is very important, particularly when teaching is based on group learning. Modular learning, computer assisted learning and individualised learning packages provide opportunities for all students to control the speed at which they learn.

- *Interaction*: moves towards interaction with others in the learning process.

  Interaction with others is particularly important for students with special educational needs as many have not previously had opportunities to learn alongside non-handicapped students or other people of the same age as themselves, since they live in sheltered or isolated conditions. The opportunities for widening horizons can be as enriching for the mainstream student as for the student with special educational needs.

Method of assessment

Achievement and attainment can be assessed through procedures other than the traditional method of the written examination. How an individual's progress is determined has a close relationship to the aim and content of the particular course, and some helpful ways of assessing and certifying students are being used in some colleges.

2. HOW COLLEGES ARE DEVELOPING FLEXIBLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

General issues

Before looking in any detail at the ways in which individual colleges are practising flexibility and at the information gathered from questionnaires and through a series of regional meetings (see Appendices I-III), there are a number of general points to be raised. The first of these relates to the notion of flexibility of learning opportunities itself.

Such flexibility is seen, both in this study and largely by those who provided information, as 'a good thing'. Many informants identified anything that was regarded as good practice as flexible and anything that was identified as bad practice as inflexible. A range of information was, therefore, given about college practices which had little or no relevance to the specific issues of flexible learning opportunities for those with special educational needs. This difficulty in identifying flexibility also applies to the place of structure and organisation in providing flexible learning opportunities, flexibility being seen as a way of operating outside any structure and in particular out of reach of the college management. This can have unfortunate results when good practice is equated with lack of organisation and structure in this area.

Structures and organisation were described by staff as being of crucial importance if a college is to provide students with special educational needs with increasing access to opportunities for learning. The right balance was described by one lecturer about one student:

> 'She has a diary in which she records what she did last week, what she wants to do this week and how she is going to do it, and that to her is very structured - and it is going to be very flexible. It is disciplined.'

Furthermore, attempts to move special educational needs outside the authority of mainstream college management may do a profound disservice to those with special educational needs, in effect allowing them to remain as an appendage to the college's main activity, with no purchase over its current or future practices.

When a college begins to open out its facilities and widen the opportunities available, the organisational framework which needs to be developed is likely to be more complex than that needed by the college which is restricting and constraining its student base. The complexity is increased because of the difficulty of introducing new resources and methods to run alongside, rather than replace, old resources and methods.

A second general point is the question of the courses available to students with special educational needs. In many cases an assumption underlay the responses from colleges that one would not expect the majority of students with special educational needs to be on mainstream or even special courses leading to nationally recognised certificates.

For example:

> 'It may be because a lot of our other courses are working towards exams and to integrate our students is difficult. There is no way they can join in a class which is following a course specifically designed to cope with exams.'

> 'As far as I know none of the students on any course we foster have qualifications other than life, certainly no academic ones. So we can pursue whatever is most important to them.'

This view was particularly noticeable from specialist colleges, such as colleges of agriculture and horticulture, art, design, music and drama. The notion that 'you can't have a handicapped student on a tractor' was widespread. However, there were exceptions. Several colleges were demonstrating very imaginative and flexible approaches towards including students in these colleges, both on mainstream and special courses, including link, outreach and full-time in-college courses. For example, two or three agricultural and horticultural colleges have been developing exciting projects with students who have learning difficulties, sometimes through YTS, and some of these have led to very positive employment opportunities. One such course is described in *Educare*. One college of music described an innovative course developed as a link course with local special schools; some colleges of art and drama described extensive work with students with a range of special needs, and exciting projects developing self-expression and self-advocacy.

Most students with special educational needs are on special courses because they have learning difficulties or are involved in courses to prepare them for later mainstream academic courses. Thus, flexibility of opportunity is often only seen as an issue within courses for students with special educational needs, and not approached through mainstream courses. Such assumptions lead to inertia. If they are not challenged, opportunities for students with special educational needs will remain narrowly defined in special courses and the issue of accessibility to all kinds of college provision will not be taken up.

A third general point is that different kinds of institutions approach the issue of special educational needs in very different ways. The ethos of adult education is not that of further or higher education, and one would expect a different

approach. Its voluntary nature predisposes it, theoretically, to open access policies and its largely non-vocational, interest-based curriculum provides different opportunities from those in further and higher education.

A fourth point is that the extent of flexibility colleges provide differs. College staff provided many examples of flexible learning opportunities. Broadly speaking, these are of three kinds:

- individual measures to help individual students, mostly in relation to students with physical or sensory handicaps but also in relation to individual students on special courses;

- special courses, usually designed for students with moderate and severe learning difficulties;

- outreach and open learning work - taking the college to the students, or radically altering the college administration to be open to all.

The kind and level of flexible learning opportunity varies from some special development for one student, to a whole course affecting a considerable number of students, to the development of open learning systems which might be relevant to the whole community. Quotations from staff from five colleges suggest the range:

- 'The students follow a fairly structured timetable but we do hope that within that there is an element of flexibility which mainly revolves around the students. If they display a particular talent for something we will provide more of that thing, or if they come to me to say that they loathe doing something, we will try to change it.'

- 'We have had one physically handicapped student on 'A' levels and he has severe learning problems as a result of an accident. We make every facility available to him. The county were very good in providing a computer, etc. for him; and when he was getting behind, they provided a teacher for him for five hours a week.'

- 'From September we have opened up college for one afternoon a week to suit students from *X* centre at *Y*.'

- 'When you look at special needs, in actual fact what you are looking at is not so much a college but more a set of resources which are released with individual programmes, group activities, etc.'

- 'We, in fact, have a flexible learning centre - the students have all abilities - run by the department of adult education, called the open learning department, and we have several sorts of provision within that. The open learning centre is open from 9 am to 9 pm and students can more or less select their own times when they can come in. We can cater quite easily for students with physical disabilities as long as the lift is working. A lot of the work is done on microcomputers. There are always two or three assistants within the unit to help students set up the apparatus and use it. There is a wide variety of courses. We have also, fairly recently, been involved in a project ... for students, with quite a lot of software ... The student goes with an AVA tutor and is assisted with the programme ... This is proving a very worthwhile area ... flexibility of time, individual programmes.'

Aims and content of learning

The first area considered in the earlier documents on flexible learning is concerned with the aims and content of learning, and particularly the kinds of opportunities being given to learners to negotiate their own curriculum, individually or in a group.

> 'The curriculum reflects the people coming in, so next year's curriculum will reflect a new group.'

Moves away from a predetermined curriculum towards negotiation have particular importance for students with special educational needs in the development of independence and in learning to make choices and take decisions. Broadly speaking, the curriculum in further and adult education concentrates on four main areas - academic skills, self-help skills, vocational training and leisure/recreational pursuits. All contribute to the goal of independence in different ways. Flexibility means that students can concentrate on areas where they need help.

Academic skills are perhaps the most traditional skills taught within further education. Flexibility within colleges has meant that methods of delivery and availability of courses can be improved, through open learning opportunities for example. These are described in greater detail below.

The amount of concentration on self-help varies considerably between courses. Some courses described were designed so that students could move out of residential accommodation, or indeed out of their parents' home, into hostel accommodation or some more independent form of living.

'We have a greater emphasis on self-help survival skills in terms of cooking and paying your bills. Other people might be concentrating more on whether they can wash their hair properly.'

Several colleges have flats where students can practise independent living skills in a realistic environment. Timetabling and resourcing these depend upon flexible arrangements within and beyond the college.

'Our training project for residentials was set up by the special needs people. My students go up on an afternoon to familiarise themselves, throughout the year; then in groups of three they take up a flat. In this project there are three flats; one is always occupied by the project staff, the other two flats are occupied by various people from ATCs and social services and also the Tech course. We form groups of three and they go in for a weekend course, a week at a time ... Then they will have two weeks, leading to a month. The aim is to get them to be independent of their families ... Each flat has a teamworker attached who will see the group through for the week ... At the moment we are working Sunday to Sunday, but it is a very flexible system.'

This example is one of many that illustrates the importance of staff commitment, and suggests how important good teamwork is in fostering flexibility.

These courses concentrate on the acquisition of skills designed to facilitate independence. Many of the kinds of skills regarded as most useful depend on the individual's ability to transfer them outside the sheltered college environment. Many course organisers are aware of this challenge and have developed resources to overcome it.

'We have independence flats where people will try out living by themselves on the basis of what they found difficult, and try it until they reach the level where they are able to operate without needing to call in staff. The emphasis in the flats is for students to recognise what they want and to call on staff for particular help. We try not to direct what we expect them to do in the flat.'

One of the aims of many courses within further education (less often in adult education) is that of vocational preparation. Part of the content of many of these courses is work experience which, for many students with special educational needs, can be difficult. However, colleges showing flexibility allow for a range of experiences according to a student's ability.

'Our students can go on a community service programme which we are formalising this year. We visit old folks, do gardens, work in the hospital ...

> Particularly for our less able students where work experience is not necessarily appropriate ... in that way they can get out and get their own areas of experience as well.'

Some colleges are able not only to find good work experience placements but to be flexible in allotting them.

> 'We try and provide what they themselves say they would like - shop work, etc. The maturity and confidence that comes from work experience doesn't seem to be provided anywhere else so this is a really vital part of the course.'

Many institutions include leisure pursuits as part of the curriculum. This is an area in which adult education has concentrated its efforts, and they have provided many exciting examples. Many of these are based within the wider community - swimming lessons at the local baths, for example, provided as a result of two residents from a hostel saying they would like to learn to swim. The lessons gave students greater confidence to use these facilities on their own. This kind of flexibility, therefore, has not only direct but indirect positive results.

Part of the aim of many special needs courses is to raise self-esteem and to persuade the student that he/she is not incapable. Sometimes years in special schools or years at the 'bottom of the heap' in mainstream schools, or a physical or sensory disability that has emphasised all the activities the young person has difficulty with, have made the student feel inadequate. The encouragement of self-esteem tends to create flexibility as it puts demands on the course organisers to find something which will act to raise self-esteem. The 'something' is likely to be specific to the student. The search for it involves course organisers in finding new and different teaching strategies.

> 'As regards different approaches, we can start off with something quite basic - if they have never written their name neatly at all you might be able to put them on a keyboard course or just give them a stencil. At least they can write their name neatly for a change.'

Many young people with special educational needs lack familiarity with many everyday things, for example many will have been provided with school transport and/or driven around by parents and will lack the normal experience of travelling independently on public transport. This provides the framework for some courses where the content reflects the aim to gain that familiarity.

> 'Every Monday and Tuesday there will be a lot of ESN (*sic*) youngsters doing an independent living course which basically is about how to use college facilities. The whole business of buying a lunch in the refectory

opens up the issues of communication. Being able to calculate the cost of the meal, choose from the menu, have the confidence to go and buy it and then sit down at a table with other students who are not ESN (*sic*) and to be able to join in.'

Whatever the aims of specific courses, flexibility can be built in so that the content is adaptable to the needs of particular groups or individuals.

'We've tried to increase the flexibility approach in the specialist areas. The typing teacher, for example, has drawn up an individual programme. In sport and recreation the tutor has done a lot.'

The ability to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of students is one that is usually more familiar to special needs staff than to staff working largely on mainstream courses. Staff support can often be very important in ensuring that mainstream staff can be flexible, as this conversation demonstrated:

'Do you have to help your subject teachers to modify their curriculum and do you work in the class with them?

Sometimes, when we can. Particularly with subjects like numeracy and computer work. We find the staff very much like it when we can help.'

Sometimes it is not extra advice that mainstream staff need, but extra support. Technicians and care staff can often be invaluable in this role.

Characteristics and stage of development of learner

Students with special educational needs often have difficulty being accepted into a college. Restrictive entry qualifications affect many potential students since they lack the traditional entry requirements. If they do not want to bar these students, colleges must find other ways of assessing people. Many college staff expressed the importance of links with other educational and non-educational bodies in assessing students. Links with social services, paramedical services and sometimes with parents enable a more complete assessment to be made of an individual's stage of development. Staff felt that it enabled vital preparations to be made to support that student on a course.

- 'We work very closely with parents and we have a support group which is available to all parents of students who come on the courses ... Next year we want to introduce working with parents of the link students.'

- 'We have very good communication links with our special schools. We have

consultative committees like most colleges. We have a steering committee for all special courses which includes the heads of the local special schools plus the principal of the college and a representative from the careers service and the head of the local special adult learning programme.'

Where an institution has a range of provision available, it is easier to accept a student at any stage of development and also allow for that student to backtrack or progress to more advanced provision:

> 'Any of the three courses is open to the student depending on what we see as the need or requirement of the particular student. For example, a student could come to us for the first year and then either stay on that course or transfer to one of the other two courses. Likewise, students can change if they feel the course they are on is not working out - they can have total flexibility within these courses. The important thing is making sure the student has the opportunity for promotion ... We had one student last year who came in on the 'Introduction to Work' course and, by Christmas, was obviously struggling. We discussed the situation with him and he wasn't particularly happy, the parents weren't particularly happy, and so we suggested he went on to one of the other courses ... As soon as he moved over onto the other course he was immediately happy, everything went very well, and he is now in full-time employment.'

Sometimes students may need some time on a different course to achieve an appropriate stage of development before returning to the initial course.

> 'We have said that we operate courses according to individual needs. For example, this year we've had some students on YTS sent to us for six months; and then they go back on YTS and hopefully they have got more confidence. So it's as flexible as that.'

This flexibility may also be arranged for individual students.

> 'We had someone on a computer course who got very left behind about week 5, so we set up a course on the open learning unit for him and it worked out very well.'

Some colleges provide bridging courses so that students can spend time (usually a year) reaching an appropriate stage of development to cope with mainstream provision. Many students with special educational needs have a range of abilities. They may be very capable in practical projects, but less advanced than their peers in the practical work. It is, therefore, difficult to match their 'stage of development' with any one course. In this case some colleges have been

sufficiently flexible to allow 'infill' arrangements - the student spends part of the time on one course and part on another (or several others).

Process of learning: Mode of learning

The question of accessibility to a college and to a curriculum within a college is crucially important when looking at the process of learning. How can learning be organised to suit someone's life style and fit in with his/her needs, rather than solely fulfilling institutional demands? To take the learning process to the learner, an institution needs to look differently at its own role and its demands for attendance under its roof at set times. The provision of drop-in facilities, flexistudy and independent study forge a new relationship between student and college. These are discussed later under 'mode of attendance'.

The process of learning is greatly affected by the facilities available. The choice of skills that can be practised may depend on what mainstream courses the college runs. Many further education colleges offer the traditional fare of technical colleges. How can they offer these subjects as opportunities for those with special educational needs? The issue is the same whether they are offered in workshops or as part of a curriculum choice in a different setting.

> 'The kind of practical work which is done with students is partly a result of the nature of the college that we are in. We have a lot of people who teach welding, plumbing, woodwork, metalwork, etc.; so our students do welding, plumbing, woodwork, metalwork.'

A number of colleges mentioned multi-skills workshops as a way of offering a range of opportunities to sample a number of subjects and to practise and develop a number of skills. Multi-skills workshops, in a few cases, also performed an additional function of bringing together students from mainstream and special courses. The range of skills available to students in such workshops depends on a number of factors, not least being what is already available within the college. The workshop approach is not necessarily a guarantee of a flexible approach, however, and can flounder through lack of support from staff, inadequate resources, or because they are seen as the preserve of those for whom there is no other place.

Some colleges have chosen to take a radically different approach to learning and providing facilities and staff, but put the responsibility of making use of these resources upon the student. Two colleges provide examples:

- 'Alternative education offers students a personal learning programme - in other words, genuine individual choice of what to learn and how to go about

it. Students can work either on their own or in workshop groups, but are helped and supported by a tutor.

Alternative education is open to people of all ages and abilities but may be of particular interest to those who do not want to go to classes where they have no control over what is being taught. Students already enrolled on personal learning programmes range from people who need help with basic English and Maths to those with 'A' levels, or even a degree, who wish to pursue their own interest in a particular subject.

This is how it works. You come into college for an advisory talk and, if you decide to enrol, are given a tutor who sees you once a week to help you work out a programme or contract of what you want to learn. That may take some time. Many people come to us with only a vague idea of what they'd like to study. Once you've worked out a plan to study, you decide, with help from the tutor, the best way to pursue that plan.

The college can provide space for you to work in and the knowledge and expertise of staff and other students. We also have a range of books and other materials and equipment you can use, and if we cannot provide what you need we'll help you find it elsewhere. At present we have:

- a study area which houses books, video equipment, tape recorders, computers and printing facilities (students use this area for private study and discussion groups and for putting together presentations of their work. A regular college bulletin is produced and there is scope for a community newsletter);
- sound recording equipment and a college radio station;
- limited sports facilities;
- an art/craft studio and a pottery area;
- a domestic appliance repair workshop;
- a kitchen and allotment.

One major difference between classes and alternative education is that we are not working to a rigid timetable. You can enrol at any time throughout the year; you can come into college when and as often as you like; a personal learning programme is not something that starts in September and ends in

June. You may have a specific target that is achieved in three months or you may work within the division for a number of years.'

- 'The open learning centre is open for students of all abilities, from 9.00 am to 9.00 pm. Students can select when they come to the centre. We can cater easily for students with physical disabilities. A lot of the work is done with microcomputers. There are always two or three assistants within the unit to help students set up the apparatus and help them to use it.

  There is a wide variety of courses, including 'O' and 'A' levels, which can be pursued through the centre. There is a considerable amount of software available for students with moderate to severe learning difficulties. A home-study course is attached to the centre, students being linked with a tutor and being able to come into the centre for tutorials and to use materials.'

To make use of open learning a student needs to be able to negotiate with others. This is a skill that is fostered in many traditional courses too, but one which requires flexibility from college staff if it is to be carried through.

> 'We attempt, as far as possible, to make it a true negotiation. If they don't see the relevance in doing it they are not going to play their part.'

Students also need to have positive contact with the college to prevent 'open' or 'distance' learning becoming 'isolated' learning, and some colleges have made sure this happens:

> 'We also do a home-study course called flexistudy. It is better than correspondence courses, we feel, because the students are actually teamed up with a tutor and they have some tutorials within the college. The work is marked and returned to them and we encourage them to come into college and use our facilities and resources whenever possible ... We do try to encourage them to join the students union which is very active ... We encourage them to go to the library and into the canteen to meet other students. If we feel there is some degree of isolation we try to pair them up with someone, and we encourage contact with the tutors as well. There are always two or three assistants in the unit who will help.'

Many students find a mixture of modes of learning helpful, or may wish to transfer from one mode to another. In this case, the close relationships between different forms of provision are important:

> 'We work closely with the adult education section of the college, which is very useful because, obviously, there are a number of links with courses.'

Process of learning: Resources

The process of opening mainstream courses to students with special educational needs is largely confined to adapting resources or creating additional support for physically or sensorily handicapped students. However, some colleges are encouraging and aiding students with learning difficulties to join mainstream courses, providing support to help them cope. One way of providing support is within the course curriculum, adapting course materials and methods of teaching to allow the participation of students with special educational needs.

Special needs tutors working with specialist teachers can assist in adapting course content and course material for those with learning difficulties. Advice on pacing of sessions may immediately make course content more accessible, as may some reorganisation of a room so that equipment can be more easily handled:

> 'The cookery teacher was, in fact, demanding far too much in the sessions, wanting the students to do a three-course meal or whatever. As they were not capable of that she ended up doing it for them. We sat down and worked out how we could avoid this and we used far less material, set it out in very clear stages, and made sure that everybody had a copy so they could easily follow the stages. Other things which made it a less rewarding learning experience were that the cupboards were too high and I wanted them to get the equipment out themselves and know where it was rather than have her do it for them.'

A second way is by providing a second member of staff or a student helper to assist the student with special educational needs. A number of colleges have set up schemes going under names such as 'befrienders' or 'minders'. These are described below in the section on 'Mode of Attendance'.

The third way is to provide extra tuition to help a student increase skills while continuing to attend the mainstream course:

> 'Two hours a week are timetabled to provide support and help with basic skills for students on mainstream courses. This time is used, when it is felt necessary, to offer whatever is felt necessary from other staff in the college. It has tended to be spelling or number work.'

Like many other aspects of flexibility, this kind of provision can benefit many students - not only those with special educational needs. Some colleges provide timetabled and/or flexistudy opportunities for any student to 'brush up' or learn basic skills. This can be particularly helpful for adults returning to study.

It is largely with physically and sensorily handicapped students that individual solutions are found to overcome disabilities. Such solutions may involve providing a braille service for a blind student, arranging for a reader, organising wheelchair access or adapting a piece of machinery. It may involve providing a loop system to enable the deaf and hard of hearing to join a course as equals.

> 'A young blind Asian girl is coming to the college this Autumn to take 'A' levels in Latin, French, History and English Literature. In order to do that, although she is not joining us for some months, we are preparing now - combing the libraries of Britain to find which texts are where; we are preparing a method of getting tutor's information through handouts on to braille for her and so on.'

Process of learning: Mode of attendance

Colleges are providing opportunities for more independent but directed study through flexistudy schemes and through the development of distance learning packages supported by drop-in facilities. A few such developments have been made with students with special educational needs in mind.

Students with physical disabilities may prefer not to attend college but for the tutor to go to their homes. On the other hand, students may need assistance getting to college, or may find that the demands of getting there are considerable, making attendance possible only on a limited number of days. (Just getting to the college may be part of the learning process.)

Drop-in facilities also frequently enable a wider constituency than those actually registered on courses to sample and develop skills. Perhaps the most important point to be made about them and the key to their success or failure is that they need to be properly resourced. There are some similarities with the multi-skills workshops, which also need to be properly supported if the educational value is not to be severely limited.

Drop-in is one example of providing learning opportunities outside formal course structures. A number of colleges have extended and sophisticated the idea of drop-in to provide a complete learning experience. Examples are given below.

> 'The open learning unit is an open access base for activities, a self-programming multi-skills workshop with help readily available on request. The focus of support is literacy, although any support necessary for the successful completion of self-set tasks is given. The room is organised in such a way as to encourage fluid groupings. It is possible to work alone, in twos, in small groups, or as a large group simultaneously.

> The equipment is organised for independent use - cooker, photocopiers, typewriters, microcomputer, word processor, book binder, knitting machine. Support learning materials, study skills materials, skill development materials, materials to encourage all room users to question their performance and to monitor their own progress are also organised for independent use.'

The college can be taken to the student in a number of forms. Distance learning packages are one of these. Special needs staff have also developed course provision that is not based on college attendance, recognising difficulties with mobility and other difficulties such as lack of confidence:

> 'We go out of the college into day centres, training centres, hostels and so on to provide specific courses for people in those places. We also go to hospitals and psychiatric units.'

Staff did point out that outreach courses were not necessarily an example of flexibility - sometimes it was simply easier to provide them than to integrate students into colleges. However, in many cases, it was felt to be helpful.

The use of mobile classrooms carries the idea of taking the college to the people a step further. Adult basic education practitioners have experimented with providing help, particularly with literacy and numeracy, in rural areas through the development of the mobile library concept, using a staffed and equipped van or bus stopping in village squares or town centres and providing help or advice on the spot:

> 'We have acquired a bus and are going to convert it. We are going to use it as a mobile computer classroom which will go on the highways and byways of the county, basically aimed at industry for on-site training. But when it is not being used for that purpose we intend to use it for groups who can't get into the college.'

Students with special educational needs may prefer to attend traditional and/or mainstream classes. One method of allowing them to do this that has been pioneered most successfully within adult education classes, but also happens within further education, is to 'pair' students with special educational needs with those who do not have special needs.

> 'We do have some classes where we try to integrate people within the class. Sometimes we have volunteers because we find that, if it is a class where the rest of the students have paid, the rest of the students sometimes think it is unfair if that particular person has to have a lot more individual attention.'

This flexible arrangement can work whether the student's needs arise from physical disabilities or from learning difficulties, and can have many useful spin-offs.

> 'The befrienders scheme is basically for students with an interest in a particular course who feel they would like to befriend a student with a learning difficulty. They go into the classes together and the able students follow their own project, but assist the less able student with things such as where the toilets are, helping social integration and supporting the tutor where possible. They are not necessarily tutor volunteers ... other students have got a lot out of it and we do need to feel we need to do more work in public relations and awareness raising ... The volunteers have free entry into the class, which is an incentive. This all helps with being flexible. It encourages more people to come into the college and the befriending system helps integration work because it maintains the balance within the class.'

When students start their courses can be an issue. Most open learning or flexistudy courses are designed to start whenever a student requires it. But traditional courses tend to have only one intake of students per term, or per year. This can act as a barrier to students with special educational needs who may have spent some time in hospital, or who may have become disenchanted with education and 'dropped out' for a while, just as much as it can hamper other students who have not been available to start courses at set times. Some colleges have recognised this and made flexible arrangements. Many YTS programmes are examples. 'Roll-on/roll-off' access has become a necessity because of funding arrangements, so all-year access is the norm.

> 'The other flexibility we have is an open-door policy where qualifications are not needed. For kids that have got pregnant or for offenders or others who make their minds up after a while, we can take them at any point during the year and that works quite well.'

Even when 'roll-on/roll-off' schemes are not available, some colleges have made minor adaptations to entry.

> 'We increased our flexibility a bit in that we now run Whitsun to Whitsun rather than September to September, which is a better time for those particular students to be inducted into college. It gives them a chance to adjust.'

Process of learning: Pace of learning

Students with special educational needs often find the pace of traditional courses

too fast. This may be because a physical or sensory disability creates difficulties with the mechanics of studying, or because they have learning difficulties that require a slower pace or repetition of experience.

The YTS extension, which allows students up to six months extra, is a good example of flexibility that helps trainees whose pace of learning is slower than most.

The opportunities within flexistudy and open learning systems provide a good basis for allowing the student to control the pace of learning. Modular learning packages, which allow students as much time as they need to complete units, are especially valuable. To date, however, there are only a few designed for students at lower attainment levels.

For students with physical or sensory disabilities, resources such as those described above can be helpful. Special equipment (e.g. loops) or adapted materials (e.g. computer keyboard extras) can be vital in allowing students to keep to the same pace as others.

For students with learning difficulties, even special courses can be too restrictive when there is a spread of ability. But with a flexible arrangement of courses, variable paces of learning can be accommodated in a similar way as variable points of access to courses described above.

> 'I would not think any student completes a core week; they all have other commitments. We don't run 1st year, 2nd year and 3rd year groups. We run a group appropriate to the subject and day ... I like to mix my groups ... We are facing our curriculum problems as we go along ... We will have to deal with various skills in different ways.'

Process of learning: Interaction

The requirement to ensure that students with special educational needs are able to interact with others has been commented on in several places. The most obvious examples are where staff have described efforts to make sure students are integrated, not only on courses, but within the college life (student unions, cafeterias, etc.) as well. Some colleges have ensured that students have access to a range of different teachers and other enablers (e.g. volunteers described above). Many colleges make sure that all special courses are taught for part of the week by mainstream staff in mainstream classrooms. Staff also described how they arranged classes so that students would mix in the canteen and other communal areas.

To enable such interaction, considerable thought has to go into how the

administration of provision affects the ability of students to see the potential for greater integration. Some colleges still suffer from having special courses sited in distance annexes, but not all:

> 'I'm on the staff of an adult education institute ... I do all my teaching in the local college ... The reason why the course is set up as a joint project is because the thinking was that people with a certain level of disability and with a certain kind of special needs background might not actually be looking for full-time employment and might not be looking for vocational preparation as such. On the other hand, if they don't know what is available, they might never be able to make the choice in either direction ... Although it's a special needs course, it's an ordinary college, and every attempt is made to show them what is going on in the institute and what is going on in the college.'

In one college where all students have afternoon 'electives', all those on the special course for students with severe learning difficulties go to one mainstream elective per week. The course co-ordinator liaises with staff and students to make sure that everyone is happy and, if necessary, arranges a co-student to provide support. Providing this kind of flexibility takes time but was felt to be positive by all concerned.

Method of assessment

The fourth factor to look at concerns the methods and degrees of flexibility encountered in examining and assessing students with special educational needs.

Many staff felt that they could be more flexible on special courses than on mainstream courses. Most said that that was because mainstream courses are nearly always geared towards formal assessment and certificates, and exclude many students with special educational needs. However, a few colleges have pursued certificates appropriate to their students.

> 'We started, this year, running a preliminary cookery course, City and Guilds, which I believe quite a few other colleges have now taken up because it is very flexible.'

A number of other colleges noted that students were able to do mainstream courses without entering for exams, if that was more suitable, although arranging this is not a simple process.

> 'In Business Studies particularly, where there is a qualification at the end, they will take students ... They can go through the course and become

reasonably proficient ... It seemed to work quite well ... They've tried it in the NNEB course and it hasn't really worked.'

Some colleges demonstrated their flexibility by describing how they had negotiated with examining bodies to allow students dispensations to take exams (for example with extra time, an amanuensis, using other equipment). Other colleges have adapted particular assessment systems to suit needs.

> 'The profile we have at the moment is the old profile ... Having developed the new curriculum to a point, we have now to go back and readdress ourselves to the profile ... so we are in the stage of reviewing the profile we adapted to fit the curriculum which we created ... The whole thing has to be dynamic.'

Formal examinations are not the only form of assessment available, even if they have traditionally been the most usual one. Several colleges made comments about assessment systems in general to demonstrate aspects of flexibility.

A number of colleges use initial assessments, formal or informal, when the students arrive in college, so that the staff know how to help them. In many cases these are open to use by and with students.

> 'Each student is individually assessed when they join and, therefore, they have an individual programme. The broad base (of the curriculum) allows the curriculum to be flexible. It has worked well so far.'

Sometimes the initial assessments are used as the basis for later 'reviews' to check progress and as a basis for curriculum development.

> 'We have developed a self-assessment system which the students complete throughout the year - a rough mean guide to what people can achieve ... that is reviewed every year so we can update it. We hope to allow flexibility in that so it can be changed as we go along ... We do try and get people to recognise where they are in terms of their skills and what they actually want to achieve ... It is no good teaching somebody something that they don't want to learn.'

Most students with special educational needs have difficulty fitting within existing assessments, either because the examination arrangements cause difficulties or because the assessments are aimed at people with higher levels of skill. Thus it has been difficult for students with special educational needs to gain recognised certificates that acknowledge the skills they have learnt. Participation in TVEI and YTS is problematic because students on the schemes should be

working towards recognised qualifications. Some colleges have overcome at least one of the problems by awarding college-based certificates.

Other colleges have tried to use profiling, which was generally felt to be a very flexible and helpful method.

> 'We do use profiling on YTS courses, and that is going to be a major part of what we are going to look at with the 16- to 17-year-old provision - something we shall be going into in great depth ... We will be approaching our tutors and asking them how they feel about profiling for adults.'

> 'The work that is done with the personal tutor is used to build up a personal profile of each student which he or she receives at the end of the course. Everything on it has been negotiated and agreed with that student, so the student has something that says "This is where I am going".'

But profiling has caused difficulties when teachers in other departments did not understand its use.

> 'The profile situation has proved extremely difficult. It doesn't matter how I present it to my colleagues. (I don't mean the full-time colleagues who are special needs trained, but the ones who service us within the college who are unaccustomed to this sort of procedure.).'

The other difficulty with profiling also takes time to overcome:

> 'It is more difficult to interpret; people have some idea at the backs of their minds what an 'O' level standard is ... They discriminate against these profiles because they have not devised a strategy for interpreting them.'

Neither problem is specific to students with special educational needs, but both are particularly important because staff believe that profiling is the most positive framework overall for providing certification for many students with special educational needs.

The one system that seems to have been accepted by most as a positive, flexible system which combines appropriate assessment methods (profiling) with a flexible curriculum is CPVE, despite some difficulties:

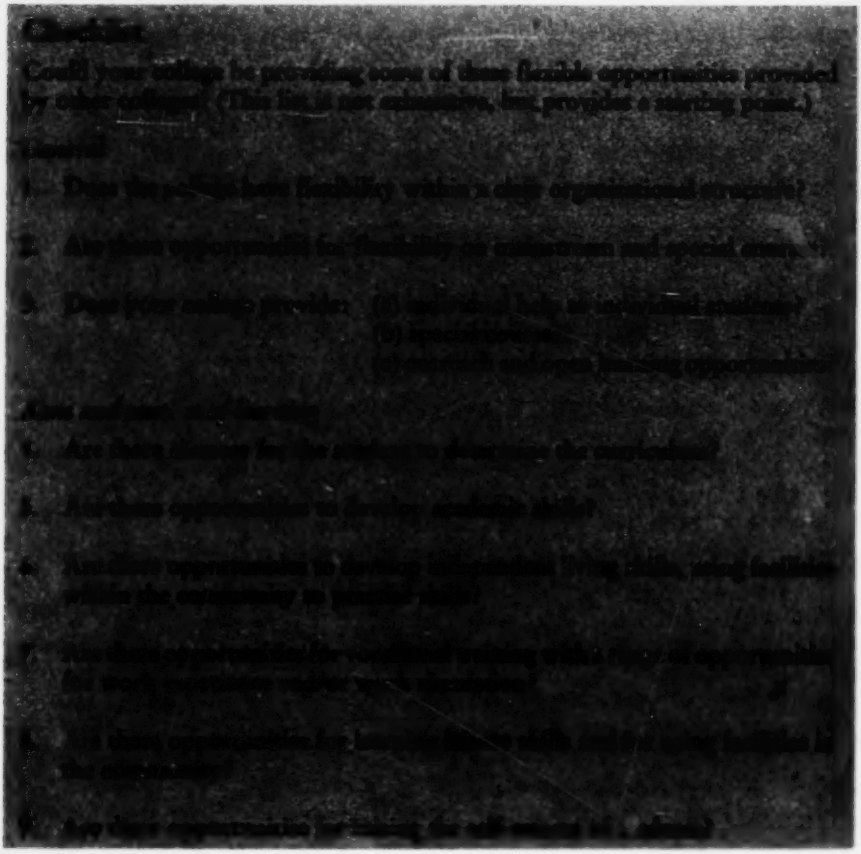
- 'It gets the thumbs up for curriculum framework. I think it can be very flexible.'

- 'People said they were being flexible in offering courses that were modular

and that offered qualifications, and CPVE seemed to answer those needs ... That is what our CPVE is about; it is about a modular scheme, about the choice in individual programmes. In my view it is ideally suited to meeting special needs.'

- 'Within its own course it certainly offered flexibility, allowing individual students to choose different courses ... They were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the fact that there was a qualification at the end of it ... In reality three of them moved on to YTS so we got progression through that.'

These, then, are some of the ways in which colleges are making flexible learning opportunities available to students with special educational needs. Examples cited do not cover every detail of every aspect of flexibility but show the range of ways that colleges are being flexible.



10. Are there opportunities for students to become familiar with the college itself?

11. Are the contents of courses adapted to meet the needs of groups and individuals?

Characteristics and stage of development of learner

12. Does the college have good links with other community services so that staff adequately understand the needs of individual students?

13. Is there a range of learning opportunities, allowing students to enter at any point and/or infill on to courses?

Process of learning - Mode of learning

14. Is a range of facilities available to allow for different modes of learning?

15. Have alternative learning methods (e.g. distance learning, flexistudy) been made available?

16. Have students been encouraged to learn how to negotiate learning?

17. Have support systems been instituted to help students on open learning projects?

18. Is liaison between providers of different learning modes good?

Process of learning - Resources

19. Is there extra teacher support (for other staff and for students)?

20. Are extra services available to students who need them (e.g. brailling)?

Process of learning - Mode of attendance

21. Have drop-in facilities, open learning, flexistudy and other alternative modes of attendance been made available?

22. Have outreach courses been offered?

23. Has support been offered to students who wish to attend courses but need help?

24. Can students begin a course whenever they want to?

Process of learning - Pace of learning

25. Are resources/support services available to help students maintain an appropriate pace of learning?

26. Can the pace of courses be modified to suit students?

Process of learning - Interaction

27. Are there opportunities for students to interact with others through integration on to mainstream courses?

28. Is provision organised to encourage interaction through integration?

Assessment

29. Has appropriate certification for courses been researched?

30. Can students attend courses without having to be assessed formally?

31. Do staff know how to negotiate with examining bodies for special arrangements?

32. Are appropriate pre-entry assessments available and can other staff and students use these to evaluate progress?

33. Where no validated certification is available, are college-based certificates available?

34. Is profiling used appropriately, perhaps within the CPVE framework?

3. OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO FLEXIBILITY

Colleges find it difficult to be flexible for many reasons - staff speaking at regional meetings and those answering the original questionnaire cited a plethora of problems, including lack of resources, poor staff development and unhelpful attitudes at all levels. For every aspect of flexibility reported in the previous section, someone else provided examples of barriers. For instance, where some colleges were flexible about entry to courses, others were the opposite:

> 'It depends a great deal on what other qualifications they come along with and whether they can fit on to the course. There isn't a great deal of flexibility with entry qualifications to many of the courses.'

Just as often, when a college raised an issue as a barrier to flexibility, another college, sometimes even a close neighbour, could point out ways to remove that barrier or lessen its effect. Thus, good liaison with other colleges is clearly a priority. Indeed, many of the staff who described aspects of flexibility in their colleges were actually describing ways to overcome barriers:

> 'I was helping to set up a course at *X* college. It was originally thought of in response to Warnock so that physically handicapped students could come to the college ... The biggest problem was that they hadn't seen that physically handicapped students ... doesn't necessarily preclude more complex difficulties and learning difficulties ... We were put in a position where we had to create a bridging course ... our bridging course had to be very flexible because we have had to alter, year by year, according to the students we have coming in.'

Colleges employ a range of tactics in their efforts to create flexibility. Tactics used by one college in one situation are not necessarily transferable. But most barriers which arise from college structures can be grouped into those concerned with attitudes or those with resources. Of course, not all barriers are college constructions; some are largely forced on the college by extraneous factors.

Hostile attitudes

Perhaps the greatest block to flexibility is the question of status and attitude, which is neither solely in the control of the college nor solely imposed from outside. Within the Burnham structure of grading of courses, most special needs lecturers teach on low-level courses with few opportunities for advancement. This is because most students with special educational needs are on special courses which are classified as grade 5. Many others are on mainstream grade 5 courses, and only a minority are on higher grade courses (DES survey

undertaken by NBHS, 1986). There is a strong feeling among special needs staff that their status within the Burnham grading of courses predisposes other staff to see special needs work as peripheral and low priority.

> 'In terms of Burnham, lecturing scales are the same whichever work is involved, if you are full-time; but then there is status attached to what you teach. We are regarded as the bottom end of the range. The image is created that we are teaching the people who are no good for anything else ... If you do overtime work with our students you would be paid £9 an hour approximately; if you work with postgraduate journalists you earn £14 an hour, so status is involved.'

Staff pointed out that teaching students with special educational needs is not 'just childminding' as some depicted it, but a highly skilled job. Comments such as 'it needs to be acknowledged that what we are doing is as important as "A" levels' were common. The sometimes belittling attitude of other staff and college management to special needs work both compounds and results from Burnham structures. This issue has been taken up by NBHS in its document, *Burham: The Biggest Barrier of All?*.

Some colleges have managed to overcome some of the difficulties that this barrier all too often puts in their way. For example, some staff described how colleges have extra senior staff appointed to special needs work. This clearly depends upon the goodwill of senior staff, particularly the principal education officers who have the power to allot staff.

Staff may be unwilling to accept students with special educational needs on to mainsteam courses or to teach on special courses for reasons other than questions of status. These include:

- lack of understanding of the needs of the students;
- fears that they will disrupt normal classroom activity;
- feelings that other students would not accept their presence;
- fear that either student or staff would not be able to cope;
- fear of the unknown.

Part of the aim of a staff development programme is to change these attitudes. Staff development programmes were felt to be helpful if they were supportive, well planned and offered follow-up.

Senior college staff who are inimical to or uninterested in special needs work create a particularly big barrier to flexibility since they are involved in decisions about appropriate areas for staff development and staff support as well as decisions about allocations of resources. In many cases those concerned with special needs felt that many of the problems concerning attitudes stemmed from the principal. A typical comment about a principal was:

> 'It is not that he's antagonistic - he's just not helpful.'

Colleges making flexible provision were often recognised as being successful because of support from senior staff. Their role in creating flexibility is commented on in the following chapter.

Lack of resources

Staff frequently cited limited resources as a reason for a college's failure to increase physical access. Lack of resources also limits equipment that can be made available and, perhaps more seriously, the ability to get the best out of equipment. For example, microcomputers are seen as a particularly useful tool for students with a wide range of special educational needs. However, their proper and full use is severely limited by lack of software as well as by lack of knowledge about software which is available.

> 'It isn't just lack of money that makes it difficult, it is lack of knowledge about what is available and useful. There is a new package which is highly praised. But it is over £200 and a lot of money to spend on just one area.'

The solution to this kind of difficulty can be good communication and contacts.

> 'We were talking about three different areas of college going in together to buy software, and they could share it and do what they like with it.'

But sometimes the lack of resources has meant staff have had to seek funding from outside the education authority.

> 'We raise money from banks, trade unions, etc. Where we need cash, if a student cannot pay the fees, we can pay them out of this fund.'

Many staff mentioned difficulties over physical access to college facilities. College staff mentioned that lack of ramps mean that some people with physical disabilities cannot get into college. They talked about the problem of persuading the local authority to put up money for such work to be undertaken.

> 'We started dealing with disabled people in the 1960s and we got our first

wheelchair toilet last year. Until last year, two members of staff were taking them into the toilet ... the only showers are down some steep stairs ... We have a lift which is very useful, but it is broken down now. So they can't get up to the computers or to the kitchens, and it is costing over £3,999 in parts to repair it.'

Other colleges take such difficulties as a challenge, using their own students in construction and engineering departments to build ramps.

'Ten years ago we had no ramps, so built three; we had asked the authority and they had said "Yes, sometime". So we just built them and we recommend that as an embarrassment - if you haven't got ramps, embarrass your authority by building them. Secondly the building had no toilets for physically handicapped people, so we built our own ...'

The old Victorian buildings that frequently house adult education institutes do make life difficult and there are often limits to the extent of physical adaptation that is possible. But resourceful people find other ways round the problem of increasing accessibility:

'It meant we had to arrange a special minibus to pick them up. To bring them into college we had to have caretakers ready ... because college is not exactly geared for access. But we managed to get them into suitable computer rooms ... We had to make certain adjustments to the equipment to enable wheelchairs to get alongside them.'

Schemes in which an able-bodied student befriends a physically handicapped student and provides additional help to increase mobility can overcome some of these problems. In adult education centres and some further education colleges, organisers can reallocate rooms to take account of classes in which physically handicapped people have enrolled.

Other barriers: attitudes and resources

Some difficulties concerning the accessibility of mainstream courses to students with special educational needs are not due primarily either to attitudes or lack of resources, although overcoming such difficulties may require both a change in attitudes and an increase in resources. Four main problems, excluding physical access, attach to students' attendance on mainstream courses. These are:

- pressure of time;
- entry qualifications;

- nature of assessment;

- lack of flexibility in relation to the curriculum.

All these problems can be overcome with support and understanding from both staff and students. Perhaps time pressure is the most difficult. But such pressure can be reduced by providing additional human support as well as by adapting the curriculum. All these problems, which were frequently mentioned by staff, have a variety of solutions, which are mentioned in more detail in chapter 1.

Lack of flexibility within the curriculum can create barriers for the student with special educational needs; courses which contain work experience create particular difficulties. One remark was echoed up and down the country - 'Work experience is just not appropriate for many of our students because they are not ready for it'. Some colleges had sought to replace work experience with something else which could be a positive experience, that is, to find an alternative rather than use the fact of work experience to disbar the student with special educational needs. Internal college community service programmes, whereby students were trained in appropriate areas of voluntary work, have been developed and are commented upon in chapter 1.

Another barrier that has resources and attitude implications is administrative access. Many students, and not just those with special educational needs or who require some additional support, never manage to enrol on a course. Some may not know that the course is available. Colleges are not particularly good at marketing themselves; it is frequently difficult for the uninitiated to get information about course content or style of teaching. The process of enrollment on adult education courses is often obscure to all but the *cognoscenti*. And even if it is not obscure it may often require stamina to stand in queues and be buffeted from one part of the enrollment process to the next.

Some colleges have made determined efforts to be more welcoming and to provide information, both in a more readable way and by making such information more readily available, for example by delivering a special newspaper giving information about courses to every house in an area. Most prospectuses still seem to tuck away any allusions to the help they can provide for those with special educational needs. A few go out of their way to attract and to make the inhibiting point of entry friendly. The following are good examples:

> 'The college welcomes students with disabilities and will do its utmost to provide special facilities if they are required.' (Front page of college's newspaper prospectus)

'If you are handicapped in any way, it is often difficult to pluck up courage to go to a further education class and also difficult to get there. So several of us who were already going to classes such as Art, Pottery and Yoga have been taking students with a mental handicap along with us for the last two terms. We have enjoyed seeing our friends gain in confidence and ourselves in understanding. Now we want to expand and open new horizons for more handicapped students. IT'S A VERY EXCITING SCHEME TO BE INVOLVED IN AND WE NEED YOUR HELP. Do ring me if you'd like to hear more about it.' (Adult Education Institute prospectus)

One major factor other than Burnham that was frequently cited as a barrier to flexibility was the role and influence of the Manpower Services Commission (now the Training Agency). Most staff recognise that it was not actually the MSC itself or its staff that imposed difficulties, but the regulations surrounding different schemes that restrict resources and, therefore, provision. The influence of the MSC was often resented, particularly when considerable changes in practice were being imposed. This study was undertaken just when two-year YTS was being implemented, and when developments in TVEI were being suggested.

'One thing that is worrying us at the moment, because of our big commitment to our students, is the new two-year YTS.'

'There are attitude barriers which are rather difficult to handle - the intervention of MSC in further education might be called hardened. How to actually talk to someone who is concerned primarily with achieving a job, at the end of two years, for a student, as opposed to talking about that student's needs.'

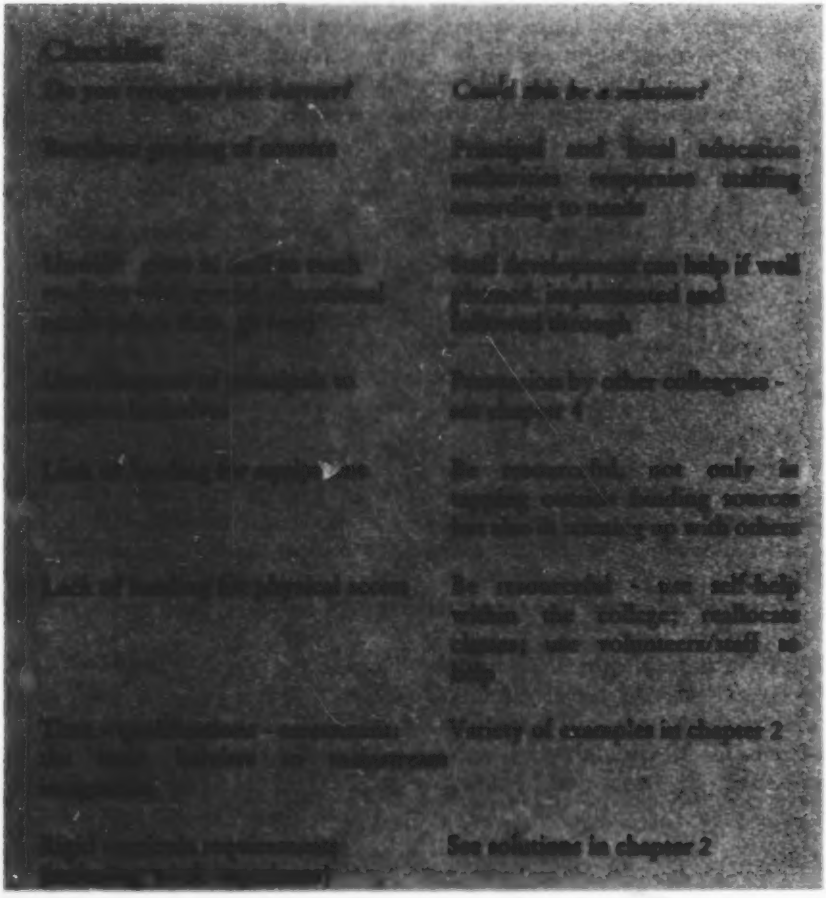
However, how far those concerned with increasing opportunities for students with special educational needs saw the MSC as creating barriers depended on local relationships. Much of the antagonism towards the MSC seemed to stem from fear at their encroachment into further education and from personal and professional jealousies. When local relationships are good, these do not occur.

Where relationships between further education colleges and the MSC were good, students with special educational needs were seen as gaining opportunities that they would never have had without the MSC. The process of negotiation between the MSC and the local college can be used to ensure that control of the curriculum does not leave the college.

These are the main barriers mentioned by staff when considering flexible learning opportunities. They were succinctly summarised by one member of staff:

> 'I think the barriers are in the attitudes and I think they are reinforced by the cash side of it, what we can or can't do; and let's face it, the students cost more money.'

There are ways of overcoming many of the barriers: resourcefulness and good communication being at the heart. But they may not be simple or always within the power of the college staff.



Publicity and recruitment that delivers or does not encourage parents' ill readiness	Providing welcoming literature aimed at specific groups of students
Funding and administration of schemes (e.g. YTS)	Create good local relationships

4. DEVELOPING FLEXIBILITY

Staff interviewed for this study disagreed fairly profoundly about the best way to effect change. In many cases such disagreements result from people being at different stages in college development or with different external influences. Views on the ways to make progress are also partly a function of where staff come from in the college hierarchy.

Two opposing approaches to flexibility emerged from the regional meetings. The first saw the only way forward as being through a total change in the kind of provision available. This demands new structures, with new kinds of organisation to suit new styles and types of provision. The second approach - the reformist position - is to create as much flexibility as you can within existing structures.

A third approach concentrates on action and changing values rather than on structure. People who favour this approach look to the development of partnerships within and beyond the college and see a role for individuals as well as for rational plans, for persuaders as well as designers.

> 'If you are a community college then your community will run round you and help you to agree objectives, and if it is ramps you want then you build them ... if it is computer equipment ... then you go to the community and tell them about it.'

The prerequisites for changing the environment to make it hospitable for those with special educational needs are commitment and sympathetic attitudes.

> 'I've always had an interest in helping the handicapped and I also taught PE at the college so we always offered our PE facilities to institutions and had camps for handicapped people.'

Without the first there is an uphill battle to change the second. In particular, almost everyone consulted (principals, education officers and teachers) agreed that if the principal is committed to a set of initiatives the likelihood of their being achieved is dramatically increased.

With a committed principal a college can find considerable discretion to act in a way that would benefit those with special educational needs, in allocating resources and in using and deploying staff.

Of course, the involvement of senior managers is important in any process of change, and it is not just initial enthusiasm but commitment over time that is required.

Persuading a principal that increasing flexibility to encourage students with special educational needs is a good idea may be difficult. One member of staff offered a powerful suggestion:

> 'What is good for disabled people is usually good for the rest of the population too, whether it is a ramp or whether it is access into a workshop. It seems to me that that sort of attitude is at the centre of the issue.'

The acquisition of special aids, the development of special materials, as well as access to resources that may or may not be in the control of the college are all important. For example, public libraries may be particularly relevant to those with special educational needs and increase the importance of a partnership approach. But many of the support services required for increasing flexible learning opportunities are also likely to benefit the college, the student body and the community as a whole. Open learning systems, drop-in facilities and ease of physical access help not only students with special educational needs but many others too. Viewed from this angle, the possibilities for making alliances increase. Practical management and practical politics may lead people to use the label of special educational needs to get things done, but the beneficiaries may be a much wider group.

Changing attitudes is never simple, and it is difficult, as sex and race equality legislation has shown, to legislate for change. Making the issue visible must be a first step towards changing attitudes. Catering for those with special educational needs has to be put on to the agenda and kept there. This may mean getting one or two students or one special course established and accepted as a positive step:

> 'That course (in college) came out of the course we started in the local mental hospital. The people who are coming back on the course are the ones that we had in the early days while they were in hospital. So it is rather nice to see them coming back in and that I think is the provision we should be expanding.'

To give clear visibility, a great deal of forcefulness may be needed. To echo the words of one head of department:

> 'There is nothing quite like confrontation for changing attitudes.'

Involving a number of different individuals and groups can be helpful in getting a change in attitudes. Having the HMI ask 'Why are you not making provision for special needs?' can help; so can the vociferous support of voluntary groups outside the education system and pressure from parents, unions and professional associations.

'We not only rely on goodwill from the staff and volunteers as well, but we found it very useful to recruit a member of the governing body for what we were doing ... she was very useful to us in lots of ways.'

Several of the college staff that we spoke to during this study mentioned that the survey on flexibility and special needs acted as a spur to senior staff to examine practices and, in some cases, make some improvements in provision. The range of external influences is wide and can sometimes be capitalised upon. The sensitivity of other students to minority needs and their active participation in providing support for those with special educational needs can be fostered. The NUS Disability Resource Pack gives examples. Some colleges or groups of colleges set up working parties so that progress by co-operation could be fostered.

'We are also members of the local special needs working party in C ... The working party has just produced a report which is going to our county integration committee, in the hope that they will make more provision.' (i.e. provision for physically and sensorily handicapped students)

Staff found that when interested bodies in and outside the college were brought together, progress could be made. To open up learning opportunities for those with special educational needs you need to enlist support, exercise persuasion and, at times, take direct action. People with special educational needs are easy to dismiss, forget about, hide away or hide from. They are unlikely to storm the barricades. Self-advocacy courses can give them a more powerful voice, but the development of education cannot be left entirely to them or to chance. It requires leadership to harness the talents and enthusiasm of individuals, provide weight as well as knowledge of political processes, encourage and support staff.

'I've now got about 18 different avenues I can follow to achieve some form of policy or decision. If one avenue fails I can try another.'

'Opportunism - All the time watching for a gap in the defences, watching for an opportunity to come up - European Social Fund, an Act of Parliament ...'

Staff development programmes can help change attitudes too. Development programmes that cut across departments and involve all staff, not just those teaching students with special educational needs, are essential if the college curriculum is to be opened up. Dissemination of information and guidance about particular aspects of special needs are as important as special courses.

In-service training will be especially important as long as initial teacher training

continues to pay scant regard to those with special educational needs and while most further and adult education staff have not had access to suitable training. Staff development programmes can bring the issues to people's attention and give them opportunities for experiential learning and time for reflection. They can include professional support staff from the local education authority, allowing college managers, in particular, to see special educational needs more clearly, especially with less staff development arrangements (*DES Circular 6/86*, explained in FEU guidance notes).

Considerable differences of opinion are expressed as to whether a college should have a written policy in relation to special educational needs. Declared written statements seem to be useful provided they have involved good consultation and are used, reinforced and updated. Resource allocation must also reflect policy statements. A policy statement that attracts no resources to allow its intentions to be implemented offers little scope for radical changes. The failure to link policy with resources made many staff view policy statements with cynicism.

Some staff felt that policy statements might limit their flexibility, but most felt that this was only true of poorly worded documents that had not received adequate consultation. The following quotations reflect staff views:

- 'I think policy statements are invaluable ... we find that we are handicapped by not having an overall FE policy ... it is a lever in management in order to get funds to do something.'

- 'I think it has probably led to more courses. Whilst it was being discussed by the academic board, it was an issue; therefore, it was harder to turn down some of the courses we had been proposing for a long time.'

- 'It hasn't produced the results I had hoped it would.'

- 'It seems to me that the process, how it came about, is quite important; if it came from the staff as opposed to being imposed on the staff; if it has grown out of the institution as opposed to being inflicted on it.'

- 'It is easy to adopt policies, but if you haven't got the money to implement it the authority can say (as has happened in *X*), we are implementing your policy ... we will take 350 years before we have completed it.'

The tone and style of a college's approach and behaviour are reflected in many ways:

– how people feel about the college;

- how they behave in relation to the college;
- the composition of the student body;
- the sensitivity and professionalism of the staff;
- the management and administrative structures;
- the college prospectus;
- the ease of getting information about the college;
- the way in which it welcomes the student and the visitor;
- even the way in which the phone is answered.

Tone and style are also seen in the responsiveness of the college to the needs of its constituency or community, and indeed of what it sees as its constituency. To provide flexible learning opportunities the college has to respond to people's needs, utilise people's skills, and organise provision accordingly. This may be seen as a form of constructive opportunism:

> '*X* has a more serious problem than other areas in terms of unemployment ... We were talking about the alternative economy; we found a lot of people who had so much to offer to others ... and they were in danger of being displaced people. We started sending out messages saying we were interested in them and would they like to come along ... it wasn't cheap labour because it enabled them to get some sort of idea about employment activities that they would not otherwise have had ... We have many examples of people who started as volunteers ... it is part of the interagency personal network. It must be more than overcoming funding difficulties.'

A college also has to be outward looking and develop a marketing approach - to sell itself it has to have a good product to sell. To provide the right product it has to do both market research, finding out what people want, and evaluation, finding out whether people are satisfied with what is offered.

These, then, are ways that college staff and other professionals identified as ways that institutions could develop towards more flexible provision.

Checklist

Flexibility to offer appropriate learning opportunities is not a state in itself, but a process or part of a process. This checklist is designed to help staff (particularly those in a position to effect change) see if they are on the path towards more flexible provision.

- Which approach to change will work for your college - a radical change of structure; a reform of the existing structure; developing action and relationships within existing procedures?
- Is the college principal supportive?
- Are the issues regarding flexible provision for students with special educational needs clear to staff at all levels?
- Are you in contact with other groups (including students) who might help influence change?
- Are staff development programmes available?
- Does the college have a policy linked with resources?
- Does the college see itself as a responsive body, able to communicate its responsiveness to prospective students?

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although much activity in further education is designed to include students with special educational needs, some of it is conducted unimaginatively and sometimes separately from the main college provision. The opportunities that do exist are largely on special courses. Opportunities for joining mainstream courses and, therefore, being in the mainstream of college life are more limited. The marginal position of students with special educational needs is exacerbated by the low status and often isolation of the special educational needs lecturer whose contact with other staff and access to decision-making processes may be limited.

Colleges do, however, offer many examples of flexibility - some through complete reorganisation of college structures, but much more often by imaginative adaptation of existing structures. These have been instituted and put into practice by staff at all levels within colleges. They are to be found in all kinds of colleges, small and large general further education colleges, specialist colleges and traditional technical colleges.

Increasing opportunities for those with special educational needs depends on commitment, understanding and leadership, as much as on the resources available. The creation of flexible learning opportunities for students with special educational needs is, however, likely to demand a redistribution of resources, or at least a rebalance. It is also likely to require a redefinition of the teacher's role so that curriculum development, particularly in relation to open learning, and providing student support are seen as being as important as classroom teaching.

Our survey of adult education was more impressionistic than comprehensive. However, the commitment of adult education to students with special educational needs is particularly strong in relation to those who need to increase their basic skills, especially through literacy and numeracy. Adult education has taken some impressive initiatives in supporting students within mainstream classes through flexible arrangements with volunteer supporters. However, much of this provision still takes the form of one or two evening classes a week - a style of provision that is neither convenient for many nor particularly creative. Adult education institutes provide a focus in many instances for meetings of clubs or groups of people with disabilities. Opportunities within mainstream adult education are limited by the dearth of aids and equipment as well as by tutors' lack of knowledge about modifying or adapting content for those with special educational needs.

In both further education and adult education, three main kinds of help are needed. First, the provision of staff development programmes is often requested by staff but so far limited. Adult education with its very high ratio of part-time staff is especially important. Second, the commitment of the principal and his or her ability to galvanise forces inside and outside the college in the interests of special educational needs students is essential. Third, a policy is probably a useful resource, but only if implementation and funding are guaranteed.

People with special educational needs have the same requirements as any other students - they need learning opportunities that are accessible, presented in a way that is conducive to learning, assessed appropriately and so on. Because everyone is different, flexibility is required to make any basic learning opportunity individually appropriate. Students with special educational needs may need to be given more flexibility, and different kinds of flexibility.

We hope that by reading this document and making use of the checklists, staff will be able to encourage the development of flexible learning opportunities that will benefit their students.

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APPENDIX I: AIMS AND METHOD OF STUDY

Aims of study

The aims of this study were:

- to appraise the extent to which flexible learning opportunities are available for people with special educational needs in further, higher and adult education;
- to identify areas for improvement or expansion;
- to make recommendations which can be taken up by educational institutions and authorities in order to increase flexibility;
- to disseminate the results and recommendations.

Methods

The study used two major methods to gather information - a screening questionnaire and follow-up meetings.

The questionnaire

A short questionnaire was designed to identify and screen colleges which were making positive efforts to provide flexible opportunities for students with special educational needs. The aim was not to gather statistical information. The questions were open-ended and based upon descriptions of flexibility used in *Flexible Learning Opportunities*.

Coincidental with the FEU funding of this project, the DES had commissioned NBHS to undertake a postal survey of public sector further and higher education in England. As the fieldwork timetables for both projects were similar, FEU and DES agreed that the questionnaires for these two projects should be dispatched together, to save unnecessary duplication of information or extra work for colleges.

Both questionnaires were, therefore, piloted together in a postal sample of 20 FE colleges, supplemented by 10 interviews with the pilot colleges. These interviews were carried out by specialist survey interviewers. Questionnaires and interviews were compiled during June and July 1985. As a result of the piloting, minor amendments were made to the original questionnaire. The final version is given in Appendix II.

The final questionnaire was sent out to all public sector colleges of further and higher education, in November 1985, along with the DES survey questionnaire. The deadline for return of questionnaires was set at the end of January 1986, but responses sent up to the middle of March were accepted.

The response rate was encouraging but not as high as that for the DES survey (which was over 90%). By the end of January, when responses were initially analysed (for invitations to the regional meetings), 61.5% of questionnaires had been returned (262 out of 426), with some regional variation (from 49% to 78% returned). By the end of March, 319 questionnaires had been returned, a response rate of 75%.

Some of the returned questionnaires were blank or showed that the college in question had no students with special educational needs. The rest were analysed. Those colleges that clearly offered very little flexibility or showed no interest in the subject were excluded. Those with substantial evidence of flexibility were invited to regional meetings. Points from other colleges were noted.

Although the questionnaire was designed only to screen colleges, we gleaned a good deal of useful information from those filled in by colleges that showed substantial flexibility. Many provided specific examples of flexible opportunities being offered, either to individual students on mainstream courses or to groups of students with special needs. Many also gave ideas about what they felt were barriers to further flexibility.

Regional meetings

We arranged six meetings in different parts of England, during the spring of 1986, to gather more in-depth information. We invited between 10 and 20 people to each meeting, most of them representatives from colleges which had shown substantial interest and opportunities for flexibility in their questionnaire responses. Others were invited because the project steering committee and project staff had recognised the usefulness of wider representation from (for example) the then MSC, employers, HMI and adult education institutes.

The list of institutions invited and those who came, along with venues for the meetings, is given in Appendix III.

The meetings were arranged to the following agenda, allowing the maximum scope for free discussions:

- *Introduction* Delegates introduced themselves. The co-ordinator (Deborah Cooper in all cases, except the first when Lesley Morphy took on the role) described the aims and methods of the project and introduced the work of NBHS.

- *Descriptions* Each delegate described the way in which his or her college was making flexible learning opportunities available to students with special educational needs. Where Deborah Cooper had highlighted particular points in the original questionnaire, the delegate was able to expand on those points.

- *Discussion of issues* Common issues raised during the early part of the meeting were noted and opportunities to discuss them in further detail were provided in the latter part of the meeting. Included were barriers to flexibility, processes for becoming more flexible and recommendations for better provision.

All the meetings were taped and transcripts made of the tapes.

In most cases, fewer than half the people invited actually attended the regional meetings. Although this must have meant that information was lost, it also meant that the smaller group that did attend was able to have a more detailed discussion.

The meetings were intended to benefit the project, but many of the delegates said how valuable they had found the opportunity to share experiences.

During the meetings some common themes arose many times. Other themes were brought up only in one or two meetings.

A major difficulty in analysing the material was that people tended to equate 'flexible' with 'good' and, therefore, described what they felt to be good rather than specifically flexible. Although the two are often synonymous, and despite attempts at careful chairing of the meetings, some very general statements were made.

One common theme brought up was the important role of senior managers (principals and local education officers). The project steering committee also thought this important and, therefore, a meeting of 'senior managers' was arranged.

Senior managers' meeting

A group of senior managers were invited to attend a meeting to discuss issues related to flexibility and, in particular, ways of increasing opportunities. Principals, education officers and advisers were invited at the suggestion of NBHS and project steering committee members. A list of those invited and those who attended is included in Appendix III.

The discussion was initiated by a paper prepared by David Blezard, a member of the steering committee. Some of the many points raised in the meeting concurred with views expressed by delegates at regional meetings who consisted of LIs, LIIs, senior lecturers and heads of department, though there were more junior than senior staff. Other views differed. For example, junior staff felt that a college policy was essential, but senior managers felt that policies were of little value without a practical commitment to implement them. Whereas delegates at regional meetings felt that principals held all the power for change, the senior managers felt that although this was true to some extent, it was local authority elected members who should be approached to effect real changes.

Writing up the results

Following the regional and senior managers' meeting, the findings were written up and amended after discussion with members of the project steering committee. This final document is, therefore, the result of a process of consultation with a variety of professionals.

APPENDIX II: QUESTIONNAIRE

In 1983 the Further Education Unit published *Flexible Learning Opportunities* which, with a later collection of case studies, *Flexible Learning in Action*, reviews existing provision in FE and illustrates ways in which changes can be made to improve opportunities for those traditionally excluded from college.

Few young people and adults with special educational needs are traditional learners on traditional courses using traditional methods of teaching and assessment. In most cases some degree of flexibility has necessarily been introduced to provide for their special needs.

In conjunction with the DES survey, the Further Education Unit has asked us to look more closely at the ways and means by which flexibility is extended for students with special educational needs. It would be extremely helpful, therefore, if you could complete the attached sheets of questions, after which we will follow up some of the most interesting responses for more detailed discussion.

This questionnaire, like the DES survey, is concerned with students who have special educational needs (SEN), i.e. students on a special course designed for people who, because of a handicap, disability or learning difficulty, are unable to (immediately) benefit from a mainstream course, and students on mainstream courses who require some means of support (human, financial or equipment) that is not needed by the majority.

1. It would assist us if you would summarise below the situation in your college.

(*Please tick below*)

College has no SEN students	☐	→ GO TO QUESTION 6
College has SEN students only on special courses	☐	→ ANSWER PART (a) OF Q.2-5
College has SEN students only on mainstream courses	☐	→ ANSWER PART (b) OF Q.2-5
College has SEN students on both special and mainstream courses	☐	→ ANSWER (a) and (b) of Q.2-5

Questions 2-5 describe four dimensions of the learning process, and the degree to which flexibility may be available for SEN students. For each we would like you to describe the ways (if any) in which the college or its staff have introduced new or flexible ways of working, teaching or training to accommodate students either on (a) special courses or (b) mainstream courses.

2.

Dimension	Flexibility available	
Approaches to learning	Closely defined curriculum with rigid entry qualifications ⟷	Individual programmes with no entry requirements

As regards approaches to learning, in what ways (if any) has your college or its staff introduced new and flexible ways of working, teaching or training to accommodate SEN students?

(a) On special courses (*Please give details*)	(b) On mainstream courses (*Please give details*)

3.

Dimension	Flexibility available	
Mode of learning	Classroom and teacher-centred learning ⟷	Student-centred learning, making use of community resources

As regards mode of learning, in what ways (if any) has your college or its staff introduced new or flexible ways of working, teaching or training to accommodate SEN students?

(a) On special courses
(Please give details)

(b) On mainstream courses
(Please give details)

4.

Dimension	Flexibility available	
Mode of attendance	Pattern of attendance totally prescribed ⟷	Student is free to negotiate attendance

As regards mode of attendance, in what ways (if any) has your college or its staff introduced new or flexible ways of working, teaching or training to accommodate SEN students?

(a) On special courses
(Please give details)

(b) On mainstream courses
(Please give details)

5.

Dimension	Flexibility available	
Pace and assessment of learning	Pace of learning dictated by teacher and by need for conventional exams ◄——►	Pace of learning controlled by students; success measured by demonstrable achievement

As regards pace and assessment of learning, in what ways (if any) has your college or its staff introduced new or flexible ways of working, teaching or training to accommodate SEN students?

(a) On special courses
(Please give details)

(b) On mainstream courses
(Please give details)

In general, are there any ways that you feel learning opportunities could be made more flexible for people with special needs?

It would be most helpful to us if you could provide a contact telephone number so we may contact you if any further information is required.

Name of person to contact (Block capitals) _____

Phone number _____

APPENDIX III - REGIONAL AND MANAGERS' MEETINGS

College/institution invited	If represented, person/people who attended
London, South-East and East Anglia regions; meeting held at NBHS headquarters, Brixton Road, London	
Cambridge College of Further Education, Cambridge	
Colchester Institute, Colchester	
Braintree College of Further Education	
Haringey College, London N11	
East Surrey College, Redhill	
Harlow College	
Aylesbury College	
Harrow College of Higher Education	
Brixton College, London	
Hertfordshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture, St Albans	
Dunstable College	Nora Assinder
Amersham College of Further Education Art and Design	Newton Jones
North London College	Penny Simons
Redbridge Technical College	Peggy Downs Gerry Bender
Southwark College, London	Rosie Fooks
Tottenham College of Technology	Jenny Corbett
South-West region meeting held at Bristol Polytechnic	
Mid-Gloucestershire Technical College, Stroud	
Bridgwater College	
Yeovil College	
East Devon College of Further Education, Tiverton	
Avon Staff Development Unit (Adult Education)	
Weston-super-Mare College of Further Education	
Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology	David Evans Kate Hawkins Steve Nelson
South Devon College of Arts and Technology, Torquay	Jim Lupson
City of Bath College of Further Education	Cynthia Barker
Soundwell College of Further Education, Bristol	Melvyn Cohen

Bristol Polytechnic, Department of Special Education	Ken Jones
Bristol Accredited Training Centre	Madeline Loates
Avon Staff Development Unit	Pat Hase

Southern region meeting at the Castle, Winchester

West Oxfordshire Technical College, Witney	David Wood
Brockenhurst College	Marian Tucker
Reading College of Technology	Bob Young
Reading Adult College	Joan Westbrook
Basingstoke Technical College	Terry O'Sullivan
Eastleigh College of Further Education	Kay Kidd
Compton Hostel (attached to Eastleigh College)	Andrew Holman
Portsmouth College of Art, Design and Further Education	Howard Rees
North Oxfordshire Technical College and School of Art, Banbury	Richard Hollingum
Farnborough College of Technology	Brian Simpson

North-West region and Cumbria; meeting held at Lancashire Polytechic

Macclesfield College of Further Education	
Mid-Cheshire College of Further Education	
W R Tuson College, Preston	
Plessey Ltd, Liverpool	
Careers Office, Preston	
MSC Area Office, Preston	
Hashingden Jobcentre	
REPLAN, Worsley	
Kirby College of Further Education	
Central Manchester College	
North Manchester College	
Blackburn College	
West Cumbria College, Workington	Bill Potter
	Barbara Wigham
Wirral Metropolitan College	Ray Stronach
Skelmersdale College	Helen Clammer
Nelson and Colne College	David Blezard
	Ken Williamson
Blackpool and the Fylde College of Further and Higher Education	Ann Moore

East Midlands and West Midlands; meeting held at Coventry Technical College

Bournville College of Further Education, Birmingham	
East Warwickshire College of Further Education, Rugby	
Sutton Coldfield College of Further Education	
Newark Technical College	
Basford Hall College of Further Education, Nottingham	
Melton Mowbray College of Further Education	
Broxtowe College of Further Education, Nottingham	
HMI (Diane Chorley)	
Northampton College of Further Education	
Coalville Technical College	
Bridgnorth and South Shropshire College of Further Education	Mike Burkett
Oswestry College	Judith Waine
Coventry Technical College	Sally McKeown Diana Wilson
North Nottinghamshire College of Further Education, Worksop	Carol Tennyson
Tresham College, Corby	Jo Bowdler
High Peak College of Further Education, Buxton	Brian Walker
South-East Derbyshire College, Ilkeston	Jim Stevenson
East Midlands Further Education Council, Nottingham	Bob Powell
Lincolnshire College of Art and Design	Frank Fern

North and Yorkshire and Humberside; meeting held at Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic

Kirby College of Further Education, Middlesborough	
Darlington College of Technology, Darlington	
New College, Durham	
MSC Area Office, Sheffield	
City of Leeds College of Music	
Richmond College, Sheffield	
Bradford and Ilkley Community College	
Beverley College of Further Education	
Sheffield LEA	Geoff Lewis
Longlands College of Further Education, Middlesbrough	Pat Donaldson
North Tyneside College of Further Education	Sandy Robinson
Nothumberland Technical College, Ashington	Mary McGarva

South Tyneside College, South Shields	George Bedell
Airedale and Wharfedale College of Further Education, Leeds	Arnold Shaw
Stocksbridge College, Sheffield	Patricia Gregory
Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic	John Rolfe
	Dr Alan King

Senior managers' meeting held at NBHS headquarters, London

Those who attended:

Portsmouth College of Art, Design and Further Education	Howard Rees
FEU	Dennis Drysdale
Tile Hill College of Further Education, Coventry	Eric Avery
Surrey Local Education Authority	Derek Hills
South Manchester Community College	David Paul
Nelson and Colne College	David Blezard
Berkshire Local Education Authority	Mike Snell

Those who sent apologies:

Shropshire LEA	R Hammer
Liverpool LEA	Anne O'Brien
Newham Community College	John Baillie
Essex LEA	T Martin
Yeovil College	R Evans
Devon LEA	R Sutcliffe
North London College	D Brace
Accrington and Rossendale College	M Austin
Sheffield LEA	M Farley

APPENDIX VI: MEMBERS OF THE PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE

Merillie Huxley, FEU (Chair)
Richard Stowell, NBHS
Deborah Cooper, NBHS
Lesley Morphy, Consultant to NBHS for project
David Blezard, Nelson and Colne College
Sue Able, Essex Education Authority
Pat Hase, Avon Education Authority
Ann Brechin, Open University
Howard Rees, Portsmouth College of Art, Design and Further Education
Mick Farley, Sheffield Education Authority
David Bell, Royal Society of Arts

FURTHER EDUCATION UNIT

Board of Management

Chairman

Allan Ainsworth, Personnel Manager, John Player Group

Members

J Baker, Confederation of British Industry
B Barber, Trades Union Congress
J A Barnes, Business and Technician Education Council
City and Guilds of London Institute
Royal Society of Arts
R J Hartles CBE, Association of Metropolitan Authorities
G Kendall, The Training Agency
D G Libby, Department of Education and Science
J O Morris CBE, Association of County Councils
L J Rees, Welsh Joint Education Committee
G M Rowarth, Association of Principals of Colleges
Association of Colleges for Further and Higher Education
B D Short, Her Majesty's Inspectorate
A F Warren, National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education

Observers

Dr F D Duffin, Department of Education, Northern Ireland
J Howgego, Scottish Education Department
R L James HMI, Welsh Office Education Department
P Watkins, National Curriculum Council

Secretary

Geoff Stanton, Chief Officer, Further Education Unit

Objectives

The objects for which **The Further Education Unit (FEU)** *is established are to promote, encourage and develop the efficient provision of further education in the United Kingdom and for that purpose:*

a) to review and evaluate the range of existing further education curricula and programmes and to identify overlap, duplication, deficiencies and inconsistencies therein;

b) to determine priorities for action to improve the provision of further education and to make recommendations as to how such improvement can be effected;

c) to carry out studies in further education and to support investigations of and experimentation in, and the development of, further education curricula and to contribute to and assist in the evaluation of initiatives in further education;

d) to disseminate and publish information, and to assist in the dissemination and publication of information, about recommendations for and experiments and developments in further education.

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